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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**STARK STATEMENT REGARDING THE CMS NATIONAL MEDICAL MOBILE OFFICE  
TOUR HITTING OAKLAND TODAY**

FREMONT – The Administration is pulling their National Medicare Mobile Office Tour into the Bay Area today with appearances in San Francisco and Oakland by Centers on Medicare and Medicaid Services Administrator Mark McClellan.

Rep. Pete Stark (CA-13) released the following statement to the Bay Area's seniors and people with disabilities regarding this event:

"It's good that the Administration is working hard to educate America's seniors on this drug benefit because it is very complicated.

"I opposed this bill in Congress because I believe the drug benefit should be much better. But, it is now the law.

"Starting November 15th, Medicare beneficiaries will have the opportunity to purchase a new private drug plan option (effective January 1, 2006). I want to drive home the message that you will need to be well-educated on the intricacies of this new law.

"My first words of advice: take your time. You're going to hear from a lot of private insurance companies urging you to join their plan. Don't rush into anything.

"Second, there are people and organizations that can help. Talk to them BEFORE signing up for anything. I recommend that you reach out to our local HICAP counselors to obtain assistance on the options that are available. These counselors are volunteers who are trained to understand the Part D Drug benefit. They can be reached in our local area by calling 510-839-0393. They also have an informative website that will be updated as more information becomes available. It can be found at [www.calmedicare.org](http://www.calmedicare.org).

"If you think you might qualify for low-income assistance, you should be sure to apply. This benefit will be most beneficial for those who qualify for these subsidies.

"If you have retiree health benefits, don't do anything until you've spoken to your former employer. If the coverage they are providing is better than this benefit, you should stay where you are. If you sign up for a new Medicare drug plan and quit your retiree drug coverage, you

may lose all of your retiree health benefits and never be able to get them back. So, don't rush into anything.

“Again, let me reiterate. I did not vote for this law. This drug benefit is not what I would have created. I think America's seniors and people with disabilities deserve a drug benefit as rich as the one I get from you as taxpayers – and which Dr. McClellan gets as well. This isn't that at all. It's important that you become educated on your choices so that you can make the decision that best meets your needs. That's the message that seniors and their families need to hear today.”